

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Madison 6

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

August 4, 1955

Dear Rakph:

What I have to say now is entirely informal, and may not prove to be a correct interpretation. You will probably hear from Skoog more authoritatively. I am sorry I had to be so mysterious in my letter a few days ago.

As you probably know, the eutrophication of the local lakes has been a terrific headache. It will give some idea of the financial stakes that the City of Madison will soon spend (unless it can evade it) about \$5 million in constructing a sewage diversion that probably will confer only a minor benefit. The property values involved are possibly larger than this locally, and the problem must be multiplied many times over elsewhere. As a result, there has been considerable support for a research program on the factors responsible for the growth of algae, principally blue-greens. This program has been going for several years under a fellow by the name of Gerloff, whom you probably know, but for various reasons was in danger of being abandoned. It has occurred to me that if you could be interested in this kind of a problem, there might be some chance of a solution (which would be a tremendous practical benefit, and make quite an impact in and for the university), there would be (to my mind) an attractive position for you, and we would have the pleasure of your stimulation and company on campus. If the position becomes available, I am sure you will be given a free hand to attack the problem from as fundamental a point of view as possible, with all that means in terms of physiological, cultural, nutritional, perhaps even genetic research. I am not sure the Lakes Research Committee (which administers the show) is really hopeful of practical success, but it wants to leave no gap in our scientific understanding that conceivably could be the basis for a practical attack.

exp. ecological

The chief shortcoming is that university tenure probably would not accompany the position. There ~~is~~ is, however, considerable financial security attached to such a popular program (aside from the tenure of the existing grant commitments and you can take it from me that if you are as good a research worker as we (you both think you are) you need have no fears of finding a permanent position in due course. It is not impossible that you would still have the time to continue with your current program, though I would advise against planning this until you have a clear picture of the scope of the immediate program. Whether Joyce would have a position directly in the program has not been brought up, though there are no laws against it. In any event, she would have no difficulty at all in finding a position commensurate with her abilities; if nothing else, there might be some way to start again here on algal genetics, perhaps even the bluegreens.

I am writing to urge that you give very careful consideration to any proposal you may receive. I think there is a splendid opportunity here. I hope that the shock of shifting your immediate research directions, or the connotations of "applied" in this work don't frighten you away. The problem is a large and a subtle one, but a fresh approach may be the main thing that is needed. Even by comparison with your possible NIH grant support at MBL, there are enough virtues here to warrant your careful consideration. Don't take on the job unless you conscientiously want to do your best on the indicated problems, but as I indicated before, Wisconsin is a flexible enough place that your future would not hinge on your immediate ~~work~~ practical success, and the main point is that you will be in a prominent position to show the quality of your research ability.

But if I'm wasting my time in this direction, please let me know.

A point I'd be curious about: are there any heavily~~y~~-fertilized lakes that are not seriously troubled with algae, and if so, why?

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg